

ACRS Submission on WA Motorcycle Graduated Licensing System Review



About the Australasian College of Road Safety

The Australasian College of Road Safety was established in 1988 and is the region's peak organisation for road safety professionals and members of the public who are focused on saving lives and serious injuries on our roads.

The College Patron is Her Excellency the Honourable Sam Mostyn AC, Governor-General of the Commonwealth of Australia.

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Introduction

The Australasian College of Road Safety is the region's peak membership association for road safety with a vision of eliminating death and serious injury on the road. Our members include experts from all areas of road safety including policy makers, health and transport professionals, academics, community organisations, researchers, federal, state and local government agencies, private companies and members of the public. The purpose of ACRS is to support our members in their efforts to eliminate serious road trauma through knowledge sharing, professional development, networking and advocacy. Our objectives include the promotion of road safety as a critical organisational objective within government, business and the community; the promotion and advocacy of policies and practices that support harm elimination; the improvement of relative safety outcomes for vulnerable demographic and user groups within the community; the promotion of post-crash policies and practices; and the promotion of a collegiate climate amongst all those with responsibilities for and working in road safety.

ACRS believes that we should prevent all fatal and serious injuries on our roads; the road traffic system must be made safe for all road users; system designers should aim to prevent human error and mitigate its consequences; life and health are not exchangeable for other benefits in society; and that all College policy positions must be evidence based.

The current consultation arises from a request in October 2024 by the Minister for the Department to review the Western Australian Graduated Licensing System (GLS) to focus on: (1) learner and provisional driver skills and training requirements to be granted a driver's licence for cars and motorcycles; and (2) identifying what enhanced components or additional requirements are recommended for a driver or rider to mitigate the risks of their early solo driving and to gradually expose them to the full risks inherent in using the road. This consultation is for motorcycles.

The consultation paper identifies areas to strengthen and improve the current motorcycle GLS system including:

- Separating the motorcycle GLS from the car GLS
- Increasing the minimum learner age from 16 to 18 years
- Reducing the learner permit validity period to 1 year, with renewal based on redoing mandatory training and assessment prerequisites
- Increasing the provisional period from 2 to 3 years
- Replacing mandatory supervision with new mandatory training and assessment
- Restricting nighttime riding during the learner phase
- Restricting learner and provisional riders from carrying pillion passengers
- Banning mobile phone use for learner and provisional riders
- Introduce mandatory pre-learner (1 day training) and assessment, and pre-provisional training (half-day) as a prerequisite to the provisional driving assessment

ACRS response to the Consultation Paper

In general, ACRS supports the proposed reforms, which are broadly aligned with our Motorcycle Safety Policy Position Statement.(1) However, we believe there could be improvements to further strengthen the system and increase alignment with best practice. Current evidence on the motorcycle GLS is outlined in Transport for New South Wales' evaluation of their scheme(2) and in reports from the Centre for Automotive Safety Research making recommendations for the Tasmanian scheme(3) and the South Australian scheme.(4)

This submission responds briefly to each of the proposed changes and has three proposed areas for further improvement outlined below.

a) Separating the motorcycle GLS from the car GLS

Supported.

This will allow GLS components to support the unique risks and requirements for the safe operation of powered two wheeled vehicles (mopeds, scooters and motorcycles).

b) Increasing the minimum learner age from 16 to 18 years

Supported with caution.

Riding a motorcycle requires more skill, and is riskier, than other transport modes. A higher entry age lowers rider crash risk and encourages people to learn to drive before they learn to ride. In particular, a minimum age of at least 17 would ensure people cannot ride unsupervised at a younger age than they can drive unsupervised.(2, 3, 5) However, motorcycles offer an affordable form of transport, particularly in areas poorly serviced by public transport, and can facilitate access to employment and education. The population distribution and transport options in Victoria may not be comparable with Western Australia.

Implementation of this proposed change should take into consideration issues of equity and accessibility. For example, South Australia has a minimum learner age of 18, but those living in regional areas can obtain a restricted learner's permit from age 16 that allows them to ride for education or work purposes.

c) Reducing the learner permit validity period to 1 year

Supported with caution.

With supervision requirements removed, a short maximum learner phase should apply so that further training and assessment is undertaken.(1) However, with the proposed renewal requirement being redoing mandatory training and assessment prerequisites, implementation of this proposed change should consider access to training facilities in rural locations.

d) Increasing the provisional period from 2 to 3 years

Supported.

This is a key component of a GLS with restrictions relaxed in a staged way as the rider becomes more skilled and experienced, while also supported by training.

e) Replacing mandatory supervision with new mandatory training and assessment

Supported.

The mandatory training will offer a consistent skills package to students. Baseline physical riding skillsets and risk management strategies (Roadcraft) are embedded in the mandatory training in ACT, NSW, Victoria and Tasmania.

f) Restricting nighttime riding during the learner phase

Supported with caution.

Riders are already restricted from nighttime riding during the P1 stage, reflecting that it is riskier than daytime riding.(3, 5) With the proposed removal of mandatory learner supervision, it therefore makes sense to also apply this restriction to learners. In line with the existing arrangements during the P1 stage, implementation of this proposed change should consider equity and accessibility issues, such as for work related nighttime travel.

g) Restricting learner and provisional riders from carrying pillion passengers

Supported.

Pillion passengers introduce issues such as particular skills involved with braking and cornering, and increase risks of distraction.

h) Banning mobile phone use for learner and provisional riders

Supported with caution.

The New South Wales Motorcycle Graduated Licensing System Evaluation identified restricting all mobile phone use during the whole learner and provisional phases as a best practice element.(2) The proposed change will allow hands-free use through in-built navigation systems and playing audio, if set up prior to commencing the journey. Implementation of this concession will need to consider enforceability, and the likelihood of compliance with separation of the facilities, particularly music and voice calls. The increased risks to competent operation of the motorcycle may outweigh the perceived benefit in this instance if there is low compliance.

i) Introduce mandatory pre-learner (1 day training) and assessment, and pre-provisional training (half-day) as a prerequisite to the provisional driving assessment

Supported with caution.

The consultation paper proposed to introduce a mandatory pre-learner training course in line with best practice as outlined in the Transport for New South Wales evaluation.(2) It states that research suggests a new learner rider will require approximately four days of pre-learner training to ride solo, although most jurisdictions currently offer this training as a condensed two-day course, but then proceeds to propose a one-day course. Experience has shown better training outcomes for the longer 2 day period, as it offers better pacing and more time to link Roadcraft strategy to the physical skillsets. The removal of mandatory learner supervision could pose safety risks if learners have not received adequate pre-learner training.

ACRS recommends that the length of the pre-learner training course is carefully considered to ensure it delivers sufficient knowledge and skills to enable a learner motorcyclist to safely ride solo on the road.

j) Areas for further improvement

Mopeds

Western Australia is the only state in Australia that issues a standalone, dedicated moped (Class R-N) licence. This allows people to learn to ride a moped from age 15 ½ and to gain their moped licence at 16 years of age, a full year before they can obtain a car licence. In contrast, several states now require a valid motorcycle learner's permit or rider's licence to ride a moped, in line with recommendations made by the Centre for Automotive Safety Research based on mopeds handling like motorcycles and carrying similarly high crash rates.(4) Mopeds are currently excluded from the proposed reforms, which would be a missed opportunity to improve safety for novice moped users. In addition, it would result in a situation where moped learners would continue to be mandated to gain their riding experience under supervision, even though this requirement is being removed for motorcycle learners on safety grounds.

Blood Alcohol Content

A zero alcohol restriction throughout the learner and provisional stage is a best practice motorcycle GLS element.(1) The consultation paper proposed to separate the motorcycle GLS from the car GLS but does not directly address how the zero alcohol restriction would apply under a separated system. Under the current system, the zero alcohol restriction applies to learner rider and novice licence holders. However, the novice classification only applies to the first licence held, meaning motorcyclists who already hold an open car licence are not subject to the zero alcohol restriction. The Centre for Automotive Safety Research calls out this unusual exemption and recommends the zero alcohol restriction should be applied regardless of any other licences held.(3) We recommend that all riders on a restricted motorcycle (RE) licence be subject to the zero alcohol restriction.

Evaluation

In addition to optimising the reforms, the WA Government should evaluate the impact of the changes, to measure their effectiveness and so that any adverse impacts can be identified and addressed.

Conclusion and Recommendations

With the continued and in many places increasing over-representation of motorcyclists in road trauma, every opportunity must be taken to improve safety. ACRS broadly supports the proposed changes:

- Separation of motorcycle GLS from car GLS; increasing the provisional period from 2 to 3 years; replacing mandatory supervision with mandatory training and assessment; and restricting learner and provisional riders from carrying pillion passengers are strongly supported
- Increasing the minimum learner age from 16 to 18 years; and reducing the learner permit validity period to 1 year; restricting nighttime riding during the learner phase and supported with a recommendation to consider equity and accessibility issues
- Banning mobile phone use for learner and provisional riders is supported with a recommendation to consider the feasibility of enforcing the concession for navigation and audio

- Introducing mandatory pre-learner (1 day training) and assessment and pre-provisional (half day) training is supported with a recommendation to consider increasing the pre-learner training to 2 days
- Mopeds should be included in the proposed changes
- Zero alcohol content restrictions should apply regardless of other licences held
- Changes should be evaluated

ACRS appreciates the opportunity to comment on the proposed changes to the motorcycle GLS and contribute to improved road safety in Western Australia. Please let us know if you need any further information.



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References

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